



Every Woman Has a Story to Tell: Experiential Reflections on Leadership in Higher Education

Robin Arnsperger Selzer & Richard Robles

To cite this article: Robin Arnsperger Selzer & Richard Robles (2019) Every Woman Has a Story to Tell: Experiential Reflections on Leadership in Higher Education, *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 12:1, 106-124, DOI: [10.1080/19407882.2018.1534246](https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2018.1534246)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2018.1534246>



Published online: 29 Apr 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 103



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Every Woman Has a Story to Tell: Experiential Reflections on Leadership in Higher Education

Robin Arnsperger Selzer and Richard Robles

Experience-Based Learning & Career Education, University of Cincinnati

This study explores and shares key professional development advice related to career paths, challenges faced, and lessons learned from senior women leaders at a public, urban, research university. Interviews were conducted as part of the NASPA Alice Manicur Symposium, a national student affairs leadership development program for women. Findings identified two themes at the personal and institutional levels. Sub-themes included strategies for career advancement in higher education, such as accepting opportunities, being visible, understanding the business of higher education, and obtaining a terminal degree. Aspiring women should be ready to navigate institutional challenges, often outside of their control, such as bureaucracy and politics, budgetary constraints, forces impacting student affairs, and institutional change. Participants shared perspectives on addressing institutional change including assessing needs and affect, exploring perceptions of change, gaining buy-in, and leveraging the change. Because emerging women leaders in higher education are often overwhelmed and confused in the realm of career assessment, findings from this study address the problem. The needle can move for women in higher education leadership positions if women identify themselves as aspiring leaders, create time for career assessment reflection, and take action to implement strategies for advancement endorsed by successful senior women.

Women in higher education often feel lost, confused, and overwhelmed in the process of career assessment and reflection (Santovec, 2010). Questions prevail about where to start and who to talk to. Many women aspire to senior leadership positions and have worked hard to establish themselves as emerging leaders. How do they convince others in positions of power to perceive them that way? How do they strategically prove themselves? First, women who think of themselves as aspiring leaders must self-identify as such, regardless of whether they fear it sounds boastful. Second, aspiring women leaders must also take action to create intentional career assessment and reflection opportunities as well as educate other women about how they can help one another. This article uses experiential reflections from successful senior women leaders to explore the topic of career advancement for women in higher education. Leadership themes and insight regarding the professional journeys of five diverse senior women leaders are interpreted. Practical strategies for career success are also addressed.

Correspondence should be addressed to Robin Arnsperger Selzer. E-mail: Robin.Selzer@uc.edu

Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/uwhe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scope of literature on women's leadership and career advancement in higher education is broad and draws from many disciplines. The main bodies of literature that frame this study are synthesized from student affairs, leadership studies, higher education administration, and diversity, inclusion, and equity. In this literature review, we address women's continuing under-representation in the highest levels of leadership, barriers to women's advancement, and strategies that are often used to overcome these barriers. More guidance is still needed and women's lived experiences can provide proven strategies for success.

There is a disproportionately low representation of women in leadership in higher education. A recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June, 2015) stated, "About 33% of community colleges have women as presidents, compared with 23% of bachelor's and master's-level institutions, and 22% of doctoral institutions" (para 4). The American Council on Education's (ACE) *Moving the Needle* initiative addressed this issue by focusing on the leadership pipeline. "Moving the Needle is all about creating opportunities and preparing aspiring women leaders for increasing greater roles in higher education" and, eventually, the presidency at colleges and universities (Hanes, 2015, p. 4). The call to purpose and action by the American Council on Education's Women's Network aims to elevate advancing women to leadership roles in higher education and to create programming that supports women in effectively navigating the culture (Hanes, 2015). Since 2012, the overall percentage (26%) of women in presidential positions has not changed (Cook, 2012a). In short, the needle is not moving. Therefore, ACE's goal is to create a sense of urgency about this issue.

Barriers exist to advancing women's leadership in higher education. One popular description of this barrier is the "glass ceiling," where the upward ascent to leadership is limited and often impenetrable. While the glass ceiling is perceived to be interwoven with meanings of femininity and perceptions of leadership, the barriers to women's ascension to higher levels of leadership are also inherent in the masculine behaviors embedded in organizations (Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013). Dixon (2013) further described barriers as microaggressions in the workplace, whereby women are placed in a "chilly climate." Once women advance into positions of leadership, they continue to face barriers like "the glass cliff," where there is increased risk of failure and criticism (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Addressing the barriers associated with stereotypes of gender qualities in leadership, Eagly and Koenig (2014) stated,

Women are perceived as less fit for leadership because traditionally feminine characteristics are less consistent with our perceptions of successful leaders. . . . When they conform to feminine stereotypes and behave communally, they are perceived as weak leaders. When they conform to stereotypes of "good leaders" and behave agentially, they are penalized for bucking gender norms (para 6).

While this is perceived or actual, it is known as the "double-bind" or "Goldilocks syndrome" (Eagly & Koenig, 2014; McGregor, 2013), whereby women are "damned if you do, doomed if you don't" (McGregor, 2013, para 5). The Catalyst research group (2007) coined the phrase "double-bind," which examined women leaders in the following predicaments that could undermine their leadership:

- Extreme perceptions: Too soft, too tough, and never just right;

- High competence threshold: Women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders; and
- Competent but disliked: Women leaders are perceived as competent or likable, but rarely both (Catalyst, 2007, p. 13).

Often, women who are competent demonstrate assertive decision making: “It is behavior that is admired in men but despised in women” (Rivers & Barnett, 2013, p. 46). Regardless of educational credentials or pedigree, when women are placed in a position of significant leadership, they bear a greater burden to prove themselves based on high expectations with a short amount of time to make their mark.

As the representation of women in leadership slowly increases, stereotypes will be debunked. Gerzema (2013) and Gerzema and D’Antonio (2013) have built the argument that leaders “should think more like women” (Gerzema, 2013, para 5). Statistical analysis of responses from 64,000 people around the world found that competencies like expressiveness, forecasting, reasonableness, loyalty, flexibility, patience, intuitiveness, and collaboration are characteristics of the “ideal modern leader” (Gerzema, 2013). While Gerzema and D’Antonio (2013) argued that women in key leadership positions in economics and nonprofit enterprises have had a positive impact, the rise and impact of women in higher education leadership have not gained the same amount of strength.

Structural barriers of “isms” (racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, classism etc.) present further obstacles. Essentially, when intersectional identities are given due consideration, the situation is even more dire. When it comes to equal pay,

Women earn less than men in almost all occupations, whether female-dominated or not. Hispanic/Latina women have the lowest median earnings, earning just 55% of the median weekly earnings of White men; Black women have median weekly earnings of 64% of those of White men. (Rivers & Barnett, 2013, p. 67)

Some African American women in leadership positions in higher education “reported experiences of being invisible, voiceless, discriminated, isolated, undermined, treated unfairly, oppressed, challenged and demoted. These negative experiences of race and gender discrimination seemed to dominate the conversation when the participants reflected on their past experiences” (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 61). Lesbian women contend with the “lavender ceiling” and face additional challenges regarding coming out and how that may affect their careers (Santovec, 2010). Hyun (2005) introduced the “bamboo ceiling” as a barrier for Asian American’s career progress. Asian Americans are often left out of leadership roles because the dominant culture values Western leadership traits, such as assertiveness. In sum, the toll on underrepresented women affects their financial and psychological well-being.

Colantuono (2014) focused on why women middle-managers get stuck. She addresses the “Missing 33%,” or unspoken requirement that women must actively demonstrate business, financial, and strategic acumen. Men are often assigned to work on projects that develop these skillsets and eventually lead towards upward mobility in an organization. Because women are often stuck in the middle, they tend to opt-out from advancing in their careers. Much has been written about the struggles of women who work outside the home and balance family responsibilities, such as mothering (Caproni, 1997; Gasman, 2013). Women may also be held back from career advancement due to parenting obligations and role conflict. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012)

explored academic motherhood and how tenure-track women manage work and family. They found that while balancing motherhood and being on the tenure track becomes more manageable over time, supportive family-friendly policies are a necessity. The proliferation of awareness about this issue has prompted a call for flexibility in the workplace where the shift moves from face time in the workplace to a focus on accomplishing outcomes (Cook, 2012b). Therefore, leadership development programs that include managerial training skills, like business, finance, and strategic acumen, and that provide attention to work-life balance issues are necessary for women to ascend to the highest levels of leadership. It also important to note that this path is not always linear (Eibeck, 2012).

Mentoring is a commonly referenced solution to address the barriers to advancing women's leadership in higher education. Often mentoring is used to encourage leadership aspirations and self-efficacy in women and the literature calls for increases in mentoring (Madsen, Longman, & Daniels, 2012). To break the glass ceiling, mentors may not be enough. According to Rivers and Barnett (2013), a follow up to a Catalyst study showed that women reported having a mentor, but "having a mentor had no correlation whatsoever with whether they got promoted" (p. 22). According to Schulte (2013), the practice of sponsorship provides a possible solution. While a mentor provides advice and coaching, a sponsor is someone with a higher authority and influence in an organization who is willing to advocate and promote the upward mobility of an individual (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Unfortunately, women are not sponsored enough compared to men.

While barriers (real or perceived) exist, navel-gazing at this part of the problem is not the answer. Many women from Generation X to millennial young professionals have grown tired of hearing about the glass ceiling, the lack of women in high level leadership positions, and the inherent sexism that has led to problems identified in the literature and debates about women's leadership (Slaughter, 2012). There is a growing emphasis on moving forward with the practical reality of how to contend with these things as evidenced by the resounding success of Sandberg's (2013) *Lean In*. Women in higher education want to know what to do to advance and how to do it. They are ready to enact their aspirations, clarify the confusing process of career advancement, and take action. As a result, many women turn to women's leadership development programs for the answers. Madsen (2008) purported that women's leadership development programs are critical to success. Effective programming around specific leadership issues for women is important to build the pipeline to ascending roles in higher education. Women's Leadership Topics (Figure 1) presents a list of the commonly addressed topics within most women's leadership development programs in higher education.

Because there are many programming options to choose from and limited resources to work with, it is difficult to know which program is best. Many involve short-term engagement without long-term support. Continual guidance is needed, which is why mentoring gets so much attention. Studies of women's leadership development from the perspective of women who have achieved success are needed because of the confusion that exists. This study attempts to contextualize the concepts addressed in the literature through senior women leader's lived experience.

According to McGann Culp (2011), the student affairs profession impacted higher education by

advocating for the development of the whole student, championing diversity, teaching that access without success is meaningless, designing programs to help each wave of new students succeed in and reshape higher education, serving as translators (and at time mediators) between students and the college community, and helping students apply what they learned in the classroom to the real world (p. 16).



FIGURE 1 Women's leadership topics commonly addressed.

According to Dungy and Ellis (2011), "student affairs work has changed dramatically" (p. xiii). More student affairs administrators are taking on other tasks like fundraising as a way to further adapt to future priorities. Finding a mentor in higher education to glean advice from can be challenging since women lead such busy lives. Interviewing women leaders who have had successful careers is an additional way to gain experiential knowledge about achieving career success.

As women in higher education prepare for advancement, it is important to study those who have succeeded. Dungy and Ellis (2011) shared that to be excellent, an individual must have a clear idea of what excellence looks like. Lessons can be learned from women at their own institutions, in their own communities. Every woman has a story to tell about her own leadership journey. Listening to the stories of other women clears up confusion and provides experiential insight regarding challenges and opportunities to anticipate while advancing women's careers in higher education. Stories communicate values and give texture. In other women's career success stories, there is connection and an opportunity to learn how to be successful.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

To date, no one has published findings regarding the pre-assignment interviews for the Student Affairs in Higher Education Administration (NASPA) Alice Manicur Symposium women's leadership development program. One unpublished dissertation explains the symposium's objectives and provides an evaluation of the professional development experience (Aala, 2012), and

found that the symposium had an overall positive impact on women's self-efficacy but that it varied by professional level. Furthermore, there is no peer-reviewed, published research regarding the impact of participating in women's leadership development programs in higher education. Another unpublished dissertation discussed how the University of Cincinnati's WILD (Women's Institute for Leadership Development) evolved into a regional-based program that was later named the Higher Education Collaborative (Calizo, 2011). This program is unique because it is one of a few leadership development programs (along with the HERS Institute) in higher education that focuses on the pipeline for women faculty and staff. More literature is needed to explore women's professional development and lessons learned along the way from women who have achieved career success (in terms of obtaining senior level positions) in higher education.

NASPA's Alice Manicur Symposium is a women's leadership development program convened every two years and is led by women for women only. It is named after Alice Manicur, the first female president of NASPA in 1976 (Nuss, 2003). Topics covered include trends in the field, campus politics, emotional intelligence, crisis management, strategy, and managing change. It is facilitated by female vice presidents of student affairs and presidents from diverse types of colleges and universities, who tell personal stories to demystify senior leadership roles. The symposium is geared towards women who aspire to become senior student affairs officers (SSAO).

Alice Manicur participants have two pre-symposium assignments. The first assignment is the Gallup organization's StrengthsQuest, an online assessment that helps people identify, develop, and apply their strengths to succeed (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2001). The second assignment, pre-symposium interviews, is intended to enhance Alice Manicur participants' understanding of assuming senior leadership roles. Interviews explore why women decided to become senior administrators; their career goals and strategies to achieve a senior administrative role; their leadership style and the ways they adapted it over time; challenges and surprises in their jobs; factors that impact student affairs now and in the future and the leadership skills needed to succeed; how they manage ethical dilemmas; considerations for institutional and professional change; the importance of relationship building; and the necessity of financial planning. The interviews are required before attending the Manicur symposium. In this second pre-symposium assignment, a minimum of two but no more than three administrators in senior positions (vice presidents, vice provosts, provosts, presidents, etc.) from the home institution are interviewed about their career advancement. While the hope is that interviews are conducted with women administrators, they are not limited to women only. Conducting these interviews led to the development of this study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to explore and share key professional development advice related to career paths, challenges faced, and lessons learned from senior women leaders at a public, urban, research university. The over-arching research questions for this study were: How did senior women administrators achieve career success and what lessons would they impart to aspiring women leaders in higher education? The interview protocol was developed as part of a pre-assignment for participants in the Alice Manicur Symposium, a national student affairs leadership development program for women. The findings from this study address the problem of emerging women leaders being overwhelmed and confused in the realm of career

development. For example, the literature clearly suggests that women are overwhelmed with how to achieve work-life balance and can be confused about leaning in or leaning out (Gasman, 2013; Sandberg, 2013; Santovec, 2010).

Structured, open-ended interviews were conducted as the method for this qualitative research. “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2001, p. 341). According to Glesne (1999), “qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect” (p. 1).

Participants were recruited by e-mail invitation to participate in no longer than an hour-long interview regarding their career and leadership journey as a woman in higher education. In the invitation, the author of this article who served as the interviewer briefly explained her current professional role and career history in higher education to provide context. She also shared that she had been accepted as a participant in the NASPA Alice Manicur Symposium and explained that they had a colleague in common who had written a recommendation on her behalf. Finally, the recruitment e-mail summarized the symposium as being designed for women in mid-level managerial positions who were contemplating a move to a senior student affairs officer position and provided a link to the Alice Manicur Symposium webpage (NASPA, 2014).

Participants in the study were senior women administrators in senior positions at a public, urban, research university. They were in the following roles at the time of the interview: senior associate vice president of enrollment management and associate provost; senior associate vice president of student affairs and services; senior associate vice president and chief human resources officer; vice provost for undergraduate affairs; and senior vice provost. The interviews explored the following topics: career path/goals, strategies for achieving a senior role, leadership style, challenges and surprises along the way, the future of student affairs, ethical dilemmas, change, relationships, and budgeting. The interview questions are found in Appendix A.

Notes were taken during the interviews to keep account of the responses and create an audit trail for dependability, but the interviews were not recorded or transcribed because the original intent was not to conduct a research study. However, the note-taking process was detailed and in-depth. Once immersed in the data, it was clear that the large amount of rich, thick data from the interviews and purposive sampling could make a positive contribution to the literature and allow the findings to be transferable and verifiable.

Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) concept of keywords in context (KWIC) technique was used to analyze the data, whereby word repetition helped identify salient themes. This technique involved line-by-line scrutiny of the text to look for where the participants circled back to the same ideas. In addition, looking for synonyms across participants’ responses and counting word frequencies were useful in this analysis method. Since short responses were given to open-ended questions, using a word-based technique was a quick and helpful way to discover themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). As similar concepts appeared, they were sorted by context. Through this process, reliable patterns emerged related to the career paths the leaders took, the challenges they faced, their problem-solving methods, their values, and their leadership styles.

After hearing the rich information shared, participants were contacted via e-mail to thank them and seek written consent to use the data that were obtained, to which they agreed. Next, a second researcher was added as an auditor to verify the research process and findings which consisted of examining the steps in the research design to establish credibility and trustworthiness. While existing relationships can be a threat to trustworthiness, in this case, trustworthiness

was established as a result of the acquaintance relationship between the researcher and the participants working at the same institution where all parties have prolonged engagement in the field (Shenton, 2004).

Both researchers practiced reflexivity throughout the data analysis process. Our positionality is important because the lens of the researcher can impact how the data are analyzed. Robin, who served as the interviewer, brought a feminist pragmatic perspective, while Richard, the auditor and second author of this article, brought a theoretical leadership background. These perspectives allowed us to contextualize the participant's voices relative to existing theory and practice. We then sought retrospective IRB approval to analyze existing records (i.e., interview notes) for data analysis. The findings were first shared with other aspiring women at the institution during the university's annual Diversity Conference (Selzer, 2012a). Identifying information was removed to protect confidentiality. To encourage further credibility, a personal invitation was extended to the study participants to attend the presentation of the findings. None of the participants offered feedback or attended.

LIMITATIONS

This study had some limitations in research design. First, the interviews were not initially intended to be part of a research study. Therefore, they were not recorded or transcribed. Instead, we used textual analysis of detailed notes to generate the findings. The acquaintance relationship between researchers and participants because we all worked at the same institution could also be seen as a liability (Shenton, 2004). However, we thought trustworthiness was not compromised because we did not have a direct working relationship with participants. An attempt was made to establish trustworthiness by inviting participants to hear results during a university conference presentation. However, more could have been done to enhance trustworthiness. For example, we could have employed member checking, where the findings were checked with the women who were interviewed. The senior women leader participants in the study worked at a public, urban university and while they may have drawn on experience from different positions, the findings are not generalizable to other types of institutions.

FINDINGS

Seidman (1998) stated that researchers should ask what they learned from conducting interviews. Analyzing interview data provides rich descriptions and synthesis towards common themes among participants. He suggested asking, "What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants interviewed?" (Seidman, 1998, p. 110–111). The interview data revealed two high-level threads, or themes: (a) personal factors related to the women's formations as leaders and (b) external factors related to how the women navigated leadership issues within the institution. Personal factors included attention to career planning, and strategizing, as well as leadership and management. External factors included navigating institutional bureaucracy and budgeting, along with facilitating change in order to justify the need and advocate for student affairs.

Personal Formation as a Leader

The following personal thematic subtopics emerged and provide structure for the research participants' responses to the interview questions: career planning and strategizing and leadership and management.

Career Planning and Strategizing

Career planning and strategizing was a major theme in the personal factors. In terms of career goals, participants had varying career ideas such as desiring an "entrepreneurial" job, "a job that is different every day", and one "where I could make a difference and apply my leadership skills." One participant wanted to "be effective in an area of passion, empowering others to be the best they could be." While career ideas existed, a key learning was that none of the women initially had positional goals of becoming a senior administrator and their career paths were not linear. This is consistent with other senior women leaders' experiences in the ascent to college presidencies (B. Coe, conference lecture, November 1, 2013). Two women had a corporate background but were encouraged by someone to enter higher education. Two were prior faculty members who had administrative skill sets (one self-described "people person") that fit. Only one participant had a "growing interest" in a senior student affairs officer role "after serving on a university-wide committee" and used her professional development experience to explore this goal.

Four separate suggestions emerged from participants' responses to the interview question about strategizing to achieve a senior administrative role. First, one participant encouraged aspiring women to "look for and accept opportunities." Eibeck (2012) also discussed the idea of taking advantage of opportunities. She explained that they will always be there, but the critical piece is to be ready for them. One participant emphasized that opportunities fall into two categories: those that allow for making "a bigger impact on the university and those that will round out a skill set and knowledge base." The same participant recognized that sometimes the opportunities may "be in conflict with the woman's primary job." Second, all participants recommended being visible and competent. One participant explained visibility as "being known for something and sticking to it." The importance of "doing one's current job well" was conveyed by another participant. She also said aspiring women should "demonstrate leadership responsibility in their current position, show upward movement to enhance visibility, and leave (if necessary) to advance." With visibility comes more recognition and more opportunities so the first two strategies go hand-in-hand. Third, one participant proposed that aspiring women "research and understand the business of higher education, such as how we earn money, measure results, and take on different assignments." She expressed that "you have to be informed to be effective." Knowing the policies and the procedures of the university as well as "being in alignment with the ethical and moral mission" is essential to advancement. Fourth, all participants indicated that women should "obtain the terminal degree in their fields, as appropriate credentials are needed" for climbing the career ladder. Figure 2 below summarizes the four concrete strategies for achieving a senior administrative role.

The topic of work-life balance naturally arose when discussing these strategies. While it was not a direct question, several ideas emerged to help those who may have these concerns. For example, one participant discussed the importance of having other caretakers in place, such as

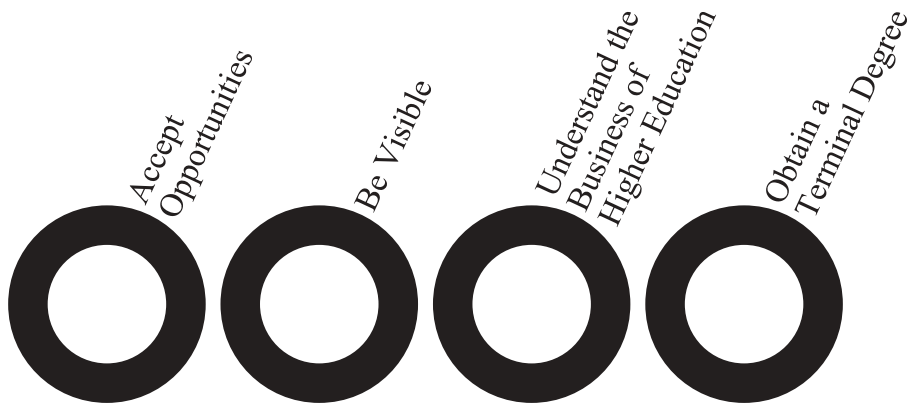


FIGURE 2 Recommended strategies for achieving a senior administrative role.

“a partner or parents.” Another discussed shifting priorities and needing to be able “to choose what is on the front burner.” Sometimes work is the priority; sometimes parenting is the priority. It was also suggested that “explaining to children why I choose the career and work I do” is important. Work–life balance is a challenge no matter the level of the position, whether a woman has children or not. Therefore, this advice is valuable for women across their career life spans: “You have to walk away from work at certain times.”

Leadership and Management

The Alice Manicur Symposium teaches women that both management (operations, budget, supervision) and leading (vision, influence, and communication) are necessary for effective leadership. McGann Culp (2011) reaffirmed that highly effective senior student affairs officers (SSAO) are leaders and managers; institutions need the experience of managers to deal with functional things, such as budget oversight and compliance with timelines. Yet, when it comes to budget, leadership is needed to align the budget with vision.

Participants were asked about their personal leadership styles, and how they managed ethical dilemmas and professional change. Six leadership styles were described by all. First, they described themselves as facilitators/guides and noted the role they play in “pulling people towards common visions and goals.” One participant elaborated, “Moving an institution means moving the whole community.” This role also led to “giving people meaningful and challenging opportunities.” Their leadership style was also explained as hands-off and non-hierarchical. There was a shared sense that their leadership involved “assuring support for people I supervise” who were in leadership roles so that they could achieve career satisfaction. One participant called

herself a “roadblock remover.” While pinpointing this characteristic, it was also noted that they had to be comfortable with becoming more direct. Firing people was an example. According to one participant, “knowing when to be firm and when to be gentle” was a skill that developed over time.

Due to gender socialization, it is no surprise that participants identified as collegial collaborators who used “team-oriented, inspiring, and empowering approaches” to bring people together. Women are socialized by gender to be relational leaders (Eagly, 2005). As relational leaders, the women shared that relationships should be “preserved and sustained,” even over decades. One participant shared, “Without good relationships, I would not be successful. No one gets anywhere by themselves.” Looking back, one person was “surprised at how many people supported me along the way” without knowing it at the time. Aspiring leaders should not “take things personally, even though it may feel personal at times.” They suggested following people with “common passions, people who change your thinking and get you excited.” “Doing your job well, listening, and recognizing and rewarding others” were cited as important to how one participant’s relationships with others contributed to her success. Overall, it seemed that every relationship is significant to success. One participant quoted Maya Angelou and said, “When you aspire to be a leader, every relationship is a significant one. Every conversation matters. People will not remember what you said, but they will remember how you made them feel.” In summary, relationships are central to leadership success.

The concept of vision and “visionary” abilities was addressed, in that participants’ leadership styles were to “create new things.” One participant suggested that one must be “clear and confident in your vision and celebrate achievement of your vision.” In addition, they classified their styles as “thoughtful and careful, whereby care was taken with what was said and time needed to be spent on things.” Lastly, “being a good listener that didn’t jump to conclusions” was a key component of their leadership style. These women knew they did not have all of the answers and that “not everyone sees things the same way.” Therefore, their leadership style incorporated the viewpoint that aspiring women must learn to see things from angles. In the context of this question, one participant acknowledged that “being adaptable and open to trying new things” was also a significant characteristic of her leadership style. Figure 3 summarizes the participants’ self-described leadership styles.

Drawing from their own experiences, participants discussed how they managed ethical dilemmas by keeping their personal values and risk in mind. One participant cited examples from “employee alcohol use at holiday parties, to sexual harassment of an employee from her



FIGURE 3 Self-described leadership styles exhibited by participants.

supervisor, and supervising an employee who was a no-show at work.” In regards to how to manage these situations, she shared two suggestions. First, “work through it internally.” She then suggested having an ethical decision-making model by a standard set of questions. “Is it illegal? Is it unethical? Is it immoral? Is it unsafe? Is there confidential information that needs to be considered? Who do I go to with the dilemma (confront the person first, deal with it at my level or go to my supervisor)?” Another participant suggested considering consistency between values and decision making, stating, “Do what is right, but understand it puts your own interests at risk.” A third participant recalled a “watershed” moment when she did what was right but was eventually let go from her position. Lastly, a fourth participant said, “No matter what, address it.” Do not “take the risk” of *not* addressing it. Women leaders have to proceed.

Five key factors were identified for managing professional change: “assessing skill set, obtaining credentials, putting together a thoughtful career map, having long-term goals and making change work.” One participant suggested that when dealing with professional change to “know where you are going and have a reason” for the change. They said to consider the “emotional impact and the head and heart factor.” One participant mentioned that the “consequences of change should be clear for you and your family.” Women should also “ask yourself if you are willing to live with the consequences” of making a professional change in advance. Once the “decision to change is made, one must make the change work.”

The topic of mentoring arose related to helping them manage professional change. Not everyone who participated in the interviews had a mentor, but each had support, such as supervisors, colleagues, and dissertation advisors, “who created opportunities for my growth and development.” However, mentoring was noted as important, and there was an emphasis on being open to mentoring from women and men. One participant stated, “We can learn from those we don’t like.” All of the women interviewed recommended that aspiring women “listen to what others share about their success,” which underscored the purpose of these interviews.

Navigating Leadership Challenges Within the Institution

The following external/institutional subtopics emerged and provide structure for the research participants’ responses to the interview questions: institutional bureaucracy, and budgeting and advocating for student affairs in a time of change.

Institutional Bureaucracy and Budgeting

When asked about their biggest challenges and surprises in their senior role, many things were noted as both a challenge *and* a surprise. For example, limited resources were noted as an obvious challenge but also as a surprise because of how often “projects were stopped due to budget” constraints. One participant discussed the need to “rethink the approach of always adding funding, and instead do things differently.” “Bureaucracy and politics” were also mentioned as a challenge and surprise. Participants explained that navigating the bureaucracy was challenging and that they were surprised by the importance of having to “learn the political players and game.” Other challenges included: “trying to gain influence over issues in a decentralized environment,” and the recognition that trying to implement “structural change affects all personnel.” Other surprises included the “need to be more strategic in outlook.” For instance, one participant explained the idea of “entrenchment” and said that “employees are so

deep within their own trenches that they are not willing to change, even when they know things are not good practices. Individual needs should be put aside and they should have institutional goals in mind. Everyone is not about the good of the order.” Therefore, she was surprised that “we don’t take the time we need to plan and are reactive.” On the other hand, another participant was surprised at the “institution’s willingness to embrace change.” Aspiring women leaders should account for these challenges and be adaptable to address the surprises.

Financial planning and budgeting were seen as very important. General understanding of “how to develop and read budgets, knowing what funds are available, understanding where funds are allocated, and if the budget is public” were noted. There were three straightforward suggestions related to how to become proficient with budgeting. First, budgets should be considered in future terms and financial goals should be in place. One participant said, “You can manage the day-to-day, but budgets are really about the future.” Second, the “plan should allow fluidity” because there are always “curveballs,” such as unanticipated expenditures. Lastly, aspiring leaders should “start at the macro level and discern where decisions are made” about budgets and “learn what questions to ask.” If budgeting is “not something you understand, you should connect at the hip with someone who does.” Serving on “budget committees” can help provide experience. Overall, “don’t let budgets limit you.”

Advocating for Student Affairs in a Time of Change

One of the interview questions focused on key factors to consider when facing institutional change as a senior woman administrator (Figure 4). Participants’ perspectives can prove helpful for aspiring women leaders seeking to advance their careers. “Change should also be consistent with the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the institution.” It was recommended that institutional change be “assessed for need and effect on individuals” in advance. For instance, one participant shared, “Don’t change for change sake.” Identifying key stakeholders beforehand was considered important. One participant suggested asking, “How is the change perceived in the community?” especially because “change is hard and feels like it puts the organization at risk.” One should “recognize there will be forces who don’t see the need” for change. Therefore, leaders should “get the team on board and create buy-in for the change, as well as explain why the change is needed.” “Transparency regarding the pros and cons” of the change is recommended. Lastly, participants recommended “leveraging change” when it does occur, while also “having patience to go through the change” because it may “take a while to deliver results.”

Participants were asked about significant factors that will impact the future of student affairs in the next five years and how those changes will affect responsibilities of senior

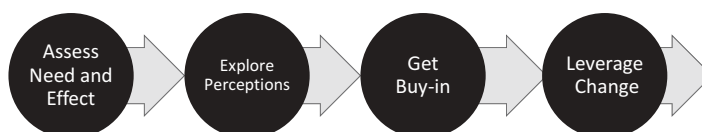


FIGURE 4 Strategies for addressing institutional change.

student affairs officers. They offered five factors: affordability, documentation related to limited resources, globalization and diversity, technology, and changing pedagogy. These are ranked in order of importance based on the frequency with which they were mentioned across interviews and the emphasis placed on them by participants. Affordability was discussed in the context of time to student degree completion. “Declining state support” was cited as the primary reason for affordability being critical to future considerations. “The governor’s ideas for two-plus-two articulation agreements with community colleges, three-year degree programs, and the need to fundraise for scholarships” were emphasized as potential strategies to address the problem.

Student affairs was described as “not well-valued, so vulnerable”: “The structure will look different in the future with some units absorbed due to economic pressures.” One participant mentioned that student affairs professionals “got into the business because they care deeply about students, but that hasn’t translated well into documentation of how it benefits students.” The value proposition of student affairs was considered a priority due to limited resources. The learning outcomes assessment movement in student affairs has prompted more leaders to enhance their areas of expertise, including the ability to “transcript cocurricular activities” and validate their contribution to the university. “We have to justify activities that have been under the umbrella of student development for years and ensure that what we are doing will support the academic mission.” With “pressures on student retention” documentation is needed to prove “the role that student affairs plays.” Documentation should address how student affairs is “preparing students to be effective.” The workforce and student population are becoming more “globalized and diverse.” Participants highlighted the increase in “study abroad programs” and attention on the “international student experience” to support this factor as significant. “Technology” was also noted as important because of “students’ expectations of use” across the board. “The impact of distance learning” education was also addressed as a key area to consider in the future. Finally, “changing pedagogy, in terms of how students learn,” was noted. The “focus on experiential learning and relevancy to the real world” were examples of priorities. “Community engagement, service-learning, living-learning communities, and career development/professional practice” illustrate various pedagogical changes.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to the extant literature by highlighting the NASPA Alice Manicur Symposium as a specific opportunity for professional development advice. The impact of the required interview assignment for the symposium has never been analyzed in published research. This study adds value to the women’s leadership literature because findings identified concrete competencies and practical strategies that women can employ to move up the career ladder in higher education. For example, this study contributed strategies for both personal formation as an emerging woman leader and tips on navigating leadership challenges within the institution.

From a personal leadership formation standpoint, the findings reinforce that making time for strategic career planning is critical to success. The findings of this study also affirm the literature that addresses women’s career paths in higher education as non-linear and substantiates the need to “embrace the zigzag” (Eibeck, 2012; Selzer, 2012b). For example, Turner et al. (2013) shared that

most women find their jobs by accident or personal invitation. This is important for aspiring women in the pipeline because they need to know what to do with their aspirations. While it is important to be flexible, it is equally as important to be intentional about creating a career plan and being visible so that others perceive their leadership. Accepting opportunities that allow for visibility is a critical strategy for aspiring women who wish to achieve a senior administrative role. Once this visibility is recognized by upper administration, aspiring women's worth as potential leaders may be more convincing. Being open to new opportunities correlates to the individual ambition that Sandberg (2013) deemed necessary so that women do not hold themselves back based on fear, over-commitment or self-efficacy reasons.

The literature review and study findings also corroborated both the need for competence in the form of business knowledge of financial matters and established credibility in the form of the terminal degree (Colantuono, 2014). While the literature on women's leadership does not seem to emphasize or prioritize it, for participants, earning a terminal degree was a non-negotiable because it provides women a seat at the table of leadership.

Relationships are critical to promotion. Given what is known in the literature about stereotypical feminine leadership traits and relational leadership (Eagly, 2005), it should come as no surprise that senior women leaders described themselves as collaborative, relational, and team-oriented. As the participants suggested, the ascent to upper administration is not a linear progression of titles, but an intentional process of building and sustaining relationships that foster professional and personal growth. Leveraging women's communal talents can allow for authentic leadership. The interview findings also suggest that aspiring women need to prepare themselves to manage ethical dilemmas by having an ethical decision-making model in advance. It is important to be transparent about how one's values align with the decision-making process as a leader. Once emerging women leaders are personally empowered by career planning, strategizing to be visible, demonstrating competence, and knowing their leadership style, they have more capacity to address structural barriers and chilly climates that impede their advancement into senior leadership positions.

Because the literature documents a number of institutional barriers and the roadmap towards advancement is not always clear, successful senior women leaders can give back by sharing their stories with aspiring women leaders and helping them feel less overwhelmed when navigating systemic barriers. The needle cannot move on women's advancement without attention to these structural issues. Beyond the strategies for personal formation as a leader, aspiring women should be ready to navigate institutional challenges, often outside of their control, such as bureaucracy and politics, budgetary constraints, forces impacting student affairs, and institutional change.

The need to be strategic extended to institutional factors like bureaucracy and politics. Participants emphasized the need to be proactive, not reactive, to politics and seemed unaware of how the leadership literature emphasizes the double-bind bias on women's influence as political players. Yet, they did reinforce the literature's emphasis on knowing the difference between management and leadership. Participants shared the importance of knowing Colantuono's (2014) "The Missing 33%" (business, financial, and strategic acumen) in order to advance. Budgeting will always be a prioritized skill and budgets should be flexible and future-oriented. Early exposure and consistent budget management throughout one's career is critical for advancement.

We know from the literature that student affairs work is evolving. Many factors impact senior student affairs officers' responsibilities, including technology, a more global and diverse

student population, and declining state support. Aspiring women should use professional development opportunities to obtain information about the future of their field so they can advocate for it, through assessment and documentation of its added value. Due to siloed work environments, women in student affairs do not always have opportunities to connect and collaborate with university departments in international and distance-learning programs, but aspiring women should engage with study abroad programs and teach distance-learning courses. Advocating for student affairs through collaboration with other divisions of the institution is integral to the success of the field.

The literature on women's leadership and change management in higher education is limited, with the exception of the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The need to navigate change within the institution can be seen as a challenge to women's advancement because of stereotypical perceptions regarding how women assert themselves when making decisions. One participant mentioned that she was a "roadblock remover." Because of what we know about the glass cliff, women leaders are best positioned to bring about change and ascend the ladder of leadership if they do not promote change simply for the sake of change.

In terms of recommendations, it is important to note that while the literature states that the structural barriers of "isms" (racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc.) present further obstacles, the interview findings did not address this. This may have been because there was not a specific question to address this directly. Therefore, it is recommended that the Alice Manicur Symposium interview assignment be revised to include the exploration and impact of this lived experience of senior women leaders on their leadership journeys. Because all aspiring women leaders are privileged and oppressed in different ways, they should explore discussions with mentors and sponsors to situate themselves with the structural barriers inherent in their institution and understand how their positionality influences change.

In the future, it is also recommended that women's leadership programs like the Alice Manicur Symposium track the career trajectories of women who participate in these programs to assess whether they attribute their career ascent to their participation. This study lays the groundwork for future studies that could further explore this topic by continuing to employ qualitative research interviewing with Manicur alumnae. Entry-level women's needs should also be taken into consideration since many women's leadership development programs focus on women in middle management who aspire to senior leadership roles. All women should be taught early (even in college student personnel graduate programs) that professional development opportunities should be used as career assessment and reflection.

CONCLUSION

Every woman has a story to tell. All women leaders in higher education must consider themselves active participants in the pipeline to move the needle. There are experienced women within every community from whom valuable lessons can be learned. Since the majority of senior positions in higher education are still held by men, it is important to tell women's stories to move the needle and promote and retain women in positions traditionally held by men.

This qualitative research project adds to women's leadership literature by bringing the voices of senior women leaders at a public, urban, research-intensive university to the table to offer

key professional development advice and leadership lessons for aspiring student affairs professionals. The findings offer a new and significant contribution because there are no other studies published on the Alice Manicur Symposium interviews. Many women are not able to attend the Alice Manicur Symposium for a variety of reasons (e.g., cost, no time off, health, competitive nature of selection into program), so this study allows access to information for career advancement. Sharing interview findings from women who have achieved career success can complement mentoring and add value because it serves women more broadly. It is important for women in senior leadership positions to become aware of how they can assist aspiring women by sharing lessons they have learned, how they problem-solved, and what suggestions they have. Aspiring women need senior women to help them realize they can do more than they think they can. The status of women can change if women confidently begin to identify themselves as aspiring leaders, create time for reflection related to career assessment, and take action to implement strategies for advancement that senior women endorse.

REFERENCES

- Aala, M. G. (2012). *Effective professional development strategies to support the advancement of women into senior student affairs officer positions* (Order No. 3513697). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1027914843). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1027914843?accountid=2909>
- Calizo, L. H. (2011, January 1). *A case analysis of a model program for the leadership development of women faculty and staff seeking to advance their careers in higher education (PhD dissertation)*. University of Maryland, College Park. ProQuest LLC.
- Caproni, P. J. (1997). Work/life balance: You can't get there from here. *Journal of Applied Science*, 33(1), 46–56. Retrieved from http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/67268/10.1177_0021886397331003.pdf?sequence=2
- Catalyst. (2007). *The double-bind dilemma for women in leadership: Damned if you do, doomed if you don't*. Retrieved from <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/double-bind-dilemma-women-leadership-damned-if-you-do-doomed-if-you-dont-0>
- Clifton, D. O., Anderson, E. C., & Schreiner, L. A. (2001). *StrengthsQuest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career, and beyond*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.
- Coe, B. (2013, November). *Presidential panel: Best practices and possibilities for advancing women in higher education*. Presented at Moving the Needle: Advancing Women in Higher Education at Wright State University. Dayton, OH.
- Colantuono, S. (2014, September). *The career advice you probably didn't get [video transcript]*. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_colantuono_the_career_advice_you_probably_didn_t_get/transcript?language=en
- Cook, B. J. (2012a). *The American college president study: Key findings and takeaways*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/The-American-College-President-Study.aspx>
- Cook, S. G. (2012b, August). Flexibility helps employees to do their jobs better. *Women in Higher Education*, 21(8), 16–17. doi:10.1002/whe.10358
- Davis, D. R., & Maldonado, C. (2015). Shattering the glass ceiling: The leadership development of African American women in higher education. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 35. Retrieved from http://advancingwomen.com/awl_wordpress/
- Dixon, K. M. (2013, October). In her own words: How to warm the chilly climate, woman-to-woman. *Women in Higher Education*, 22(10), 8–9. doi:10.1002/whe.2013.22.issue-10
- Dungy, G. J., & Ellis, S. E. (2011). *Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators Leadership Strategies and Competencies for Success*. Washington, DC: NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- Eagly, A., & Koenig, A. (2014, June 9). *Research reveals how stereotypes about leadership hold women back*. Footnote. Retrieved from <http://footnote1.com/research-reveals-how-stereotypes-about-leadership-hold-women-back/>

- Eagly, A. H. (2005). Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: Does gender matter? *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 459–474. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.007
- Eibeck, P. (2012, April). Opportunities taken or not: A woman president's journey. *Women in Higher Education*, 21(4), 1–2. doi:10.1002/whe.10311
- Gasman, M. (2013). *Mother professor/Professor mother*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marybeth-gasman/mother-professor-professor-mother_b_3479034.html
- Gerzema, J. (2013, August 12). "Feminine" values can give tomorrow's leaders an edge. Harvard business review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2013/08/research-male-leaders-should-think-more-like-women/>
- Gerzema, J., & D'Antonio, M. (2013). *The Athena doctrine: How women (and the men who think like them) will rule the future*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Hanes, M. L. (2015). Moving the needle- The contours of the problem. *Network News*, 1(4). Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/NetworkNews-Winter-2015.pdf>
- Hyun, J. (2005). *Breaking the bamboo ceiling: Career strategies for Asians*. New York, NY: Harper.
- June, A. W. (2015, March 16). *Despite progress, only 1 in 4 college presidents are women*. The chronicle of higher education. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Despite-Progress-Only-1-in-4/228473/#disqus_thread
- Madsen, S. R. (2008). *On becoming a woman leader: Learning from the experiences of university presidents* (Vol. 124). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Madsen, S. R., Longman, K. A., & Daniels, J. R. (2012). Women's leadership development in higher education: Conclusion and implications for HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 14(1), 113–128. doi:10.1177/1523422311429734
- McGann Culp, M. (2011). Don't fence me in: The senior student affairs officer in the 21st century community college. In G. J. Dungey & S. E. Ellis (Eds.), *Exceptional senior student affairs administrators' leadership strategies and competencies for success* (pp. 15–41). Washington, DC: NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- McGregor, J. (2013, July). Women leaders and the Goldilocks syndrome: Not too harsh, not too soft. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-leadership/wp/2013/07/09/women-leaders-and-the-goldilocks-syndrome-not-too-harsh-not-too-soft/>
- NASPA. (2014). *2014 NASPA alicia manicur symposium*. Retrieved from <https://www.naspa.org/events/2014manicur>
- Nuss, E. M. (2003). The development of student affairs. In S. Komives & D. B. Woodward Jr. Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 65–88). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. (2001). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rivers, C., & Barnett, R. (2013). *The new soft war on women: How the myth of female ascendance is hurting women, men and our economy*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85–109. doi:10.1177/1525822X02239569
- Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2005). The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management*, 16(2), 81–90. doi:10.1111/bjom.2005.16.issue-2
- Sandberg, S. (2013). *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Santovec, M. L. (2010). Women reflect on the SSAO job search process. *Women in Higher Education*, 19, 8–9. doi:10.1002/whe.10103
- Schulte, B. (2013, November 14). Major national companies try 'sponsorship' as new hammer to break glass ceiling. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/major-national-companies-try-sponsorship-as-new-hammer-to-break-glass-ceiling/2013/11/13/6f7663c0-3ba8-11e3-b7ba-503fb5822c3e_story.html
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as Qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Selzer, R. (2012a). *Leadership lessons: Journeys from UC women*. 2012 University of Cincinnati Diversity Conference, Cincinnati, OH.
- Selzer, R. (2012b, April 18). *Embracing the zigzag*. Retrieved from <https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/posts/embracing-the-zigzag-by-robin-arnsperger-selzer-ph.d>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22, 63–75. doi:10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

- Slaughter, A. M. (2012, July/August). *Why women still can't have it all*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>
- Turner, P. K., Norwood, K., & Noe, C. (2013). A woman with a plan: Recognizing competencies for ascent to administration in higher education. *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education*, 6(1), 22–47. doi:10.1515/njawhe-2013-0003
- Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2012). *Academic motherhood: How faculty manage work and family*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

APPENDIX A

1. When did you decide to be a senior administrator? What brought you to your career as a senior administrator?
2. What was your career goal?
3. What strategies would you recommend I consider in achieving a senior administrative role?
4. How would you describe your leadership style? In what ways have you had to adapt your leadership style as your career progressed? If so, how and why?
5. In your current position as a senior officer, what have been your biggest challenges/surprises to date?
6. What are the most significant forces, factors, or changes that will impact the future of Student Affairs and student services in the next five years? How will these changes affect the role and responsibilities of senior student affairs officers and the skills that will be needed for successful leadership?
7. Could you give an example of an ethical dilemma you confronted and how you managed it?
8. What are the key factors to consider when facing institutional or professional change?
9. Have your relationships with others contributed to your success? If so, how?

How important is it to understand financial planning and budgeting? What advice do you have for me on these issues?